

To participate in this series of Virtual Wine Tastings, you must become a 'friend' of Donniella Winchell on Facebook. All of the details of participation will be shared through Facebook.

For those who choose to participate, below are some tools as background for the chardonnay tasting event – as well as a review of Riesling which we tasted in the spring.



Part I – The Wine

Chardonnay, the 'Queen' of white wines

Around the world, chardonnay is recognized as the most noble of white wines. It is widely planted, capable of producing a broad range of wine styles and has almost universal appeal.

Chardonnay was one of the first 'viniferas' [European style grapes] to be successfully grown in Ohio. While it is surely susceptible to injury from our uneven and rather harsh winter temperatures, it usually experiences less winter damage than more tender varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot or Pinot Noir.

The integrity of a wine producing region is based largely on its ability to grow the fruit from which local wines can be made. When pioneers like Arnie Esterer, of Markko Vineyards in Conneaut, illustrated that the variety could successfully be grown and yield wines of notable quality, many regional producers followed his lead.

Chardonnay vines take their name from a village in France near Macon and yield rather longish bunches with golden berries that are almost translucent when fully ripe. As finished wines, they very much reflect growing conditions and cellaring techniques used by each winemaker. Some chardonnays are grown in heavy soils, fermented and aged in oak barrels for an extended period. The resulting wines are big, full of vanilla, heavy with oak and long lived. Other grapes are grown in light gravelly soils, fermented in stainless steel and aged only for a few weeks or months in oak. They are fresher, lighter, less complex with a fruit 'up front' finish. Regardless of techniques used, most chardonnays age well, developing depth, complexity and interest in the bottle.

Every fine restaurant offers a plethora of chardonnay selections. Some cynics believe it became the country's most popular white in the early eighties because it has a name that is easy to pronounce. While there may be a grain of truth in that suggestion, a more plausible explanation is that chardonnay is truly a great grape which produces pleasant, interesting wines and complements many styles and varieties of cuisine. With flavors of apple, pear, citrus, peach, butter, honey, butter and vanilla, how could it not be widely accepted as an appealing food wine?

Part II -- Tasting techniques and notes

Today you will enjoy a unique wine tasting experience. Hopefully you will leave with a greater understanding of the nuances of wine generally and chardonnay specifically.

When we begin the actual wine tasting: four basic steps can contribute to a taster's appreciation of wine:

- 1) Observe the wine, hold it up to the light. Note its color, viscosity and check for any obvious imperfections. It should be clear, even brilliant and its color range within an acceptable range of hues.
- 2) Slosh the glass gently to release the various aromas. Smell for the fresh fruitiness of a young wine, enjoy the accumulated aromas of a mature wine's bouquet.
- 3) Take a small sip. Roll the wine around so it covers all corners of your mouth. Think about the sensations you are experiencing.
- 4) Swallow the wine. Note the 'finish,' its length, intensity, memorableness.

Part III – Rating Sheet

Rate the wines 1 [low] to 4 [high] – a maximum of 16 points per wine

Wine Producer	Color	Aroma	Taste	Finish	Total score
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

From a prior Virtual Tasting: Riesling



Part I

Riesling, a premier grape variety for this region

Riesling is a grape variety internationally known for its amazing versatility – and flourishes in wine regions around the world. It is certainly the variety upon which the Germans built their stellar reputation for fine wines. Some very interesting Rieslings are produced in Switzerland, but are seldom available beyond the Continent. It is widely planted and appreciated in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Russia and in several eastern European countries. In the Northwest United States, winemakers produce flinty, dry and fruity, off dry styles. Northern California boasts dozens of wineries that vinify this popular varietal. The Canadian province of Ontario is well known for its elegant table wines as well as for dessert wines with luscious, sweet finishes. A new International Riesling Foundation was formed in 2008 to share ideas and promote this variety with drinkers worldwide.

Some of the finest Rieslings in the world are produced in the eastern United States – in the Finger Lakes Region of New York and right here in Ohio. Our state winemakers have won best of show and best of class in both the Riverside [California] International competition and in the San Francisco Chronicle wine judging.

Riesling is a 'cool-climate' varietal. Among the numerous Germanic varieties, many experts believe Riesling most closely reflects the soils, microclimates and other elements unique to the vineyards in which it is grown. While Rieslings grow nearly everywhere in the state, most are grown within the influence of Lake Erie. Soils and climate along the lakeshore produce fruit with excellent natural acids and sugars. However, with the help of researchers from the Ohio State University, our growers have identified certain 'clones' that will best adapt to the elements found in many microclimates across the state.

Most Ohio Rieslings are made in an off dry or slightly sweet style with a fresh, light finish. Our Riesling 'nose' is described as fruity, with hints of melon or citrus or honey. They are noted for their 'backbone' and 'balance.'